VAIṢṆAVISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Dr. J. D. Baskara Doss

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Foreword

The Literary works of Dr. J. D. Baskaradoss has brought about books on the origin and developement of Tamil Bhakti Movement and the influence of Christianity over it. The advent of Christianity into India dates back to the 1st centurary AD which coincides with the arrival of St. Thomas, the apostle of Jesus Christ.

This book on Vainavism and Christianity is one such attempt in bringing out the fact that the doctrine of Trinity in Indian religions was the outcome of the Christian doctrine of Triune God. Naturally the Triune God of Vaisnavism ia based on the Trinity of New Testament. The Author goes on to explain the concept of Avatar and incarnation and the fulfillment of sacrifice. An impassionate study of this book will reveal the truth.

We thank God for this commendable work by the Author. The Trustees of our organisation join with me in wishing him for all his future works and the ministry. We also thank Bro. N. John Jeyanandam, P. Bose Ponraj, Moriah Ministries for his prayerful involvement.

G. J. Pandithurai

Founder Trustee & President

NILT

Preface

'Dravide Utpanna Bhakti' is a famous quotation for Bhakti movement originated in Dravida country and it had gained momentum and spread through the North. The Historians and the scholars attest that Vedic Thoughts had never contributed to the origin and development of Vaishnavism.

Six fold religion viz. Saivism, Vaishnavism, Saktam, Ganapathyam, Goumaram and Souram are the outcome of Bhakti Movement. In this millieu Thirukkural had played a very vital role. We also had witnessed Tamil Nadu had interaction with the foreign countries – the ancient Tamil poetry give enormous data about the spice routes and silk routes with which our country was very well linked with the neighbouring countries and as a result the economy of our country grew besides the intellectual and the spiritual spheres.

The revolutionary preaching of Jesus Christ in the beginning of 1st century brought about a sea change not only in Palestine but it had reverberated in various parts of the globe by the apostles of Jesus after his resurrection. St. Thomas, the direct disciple of Jesus came to India in 49 AD during the reign of Gondapharus in Taxila, he went back to Palestine on hearing the sad demise of Mary, the mother of Jesus and he returned to India in 52 AD and started his mission in Malabar and he extended his field of Gospel work to Tamil Nadu for a period of Twenty years and was martyred in Mylapore in 72 AD.

A fund of information and research works by the contemporary eminent scholars have opened new vistas to look at the popular Indian religions from a different angle comparing it with Christianity.

This small book is an attempt in this line and this actually was presented as a research paper before the learned scholars at Bronx, New York in 2005 during the First International Conference on the History of Early Christianity in India. I thank Dr. John Samuel, Founder President of International Centre for the Study of Christianity in India for his permission to publish this book. I also thank my brothers of the family of NILT Messrs G. J. Pandithurai, A. J. Rajasekaran, R. Soundar Rajan, Sharon Devaprasannam for their untiring support in publishing this book. I sincerely thank Pastor Oswin Michael Of Jesus Family Ministry, Jersey City for his gesture.

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Introduction

The advent of Christianity into India dates back to the middle of 1st c.A.D. which coincides with the arrival of St.Thomas, the apostle of Jesus Christ. It has been recorded in the history that Tamil Nadu carried out trade with the neighbouring countries both by land and sea. This helped the interaction with the people and the dissemination of the gospel of Jesus proclaimed by the 'early' missionaries in India. The origin and development of Tamil Bhakti Movement dates back not prior to the fifth century A.D. It may appear to be hypothetical that Christianity may have given rise to the origin of Vaiṣṇavism and other Indian religions. This proposition is taken up for a brief analysis in the following pages.

Origin of Vaiṣṇavism

As Dr.Keith observes in Journal of Royal Asiatic Society states that:

"The first great theistic movement of India is that of Ramanuja. However precisely, at this point we are met with the fact that Christian religious influences are possible and even probable".[1]

Ramanuja lived in the 12th c.AD in Sriperumpudur in Tamil Nadu and he was the exponent of Visistādvaita. Eminent scholars like Weber, Seal, Macnicol, Kennedy have also pointed out the possibilities of the influence of Christianity on Vaiṣnavism.

Hemchandra Raychaudhuri observes the account of Lassen in his book:

"Lassen concurs in the belief that some Brāhmanas became acquainted with Christianity in some country lying to the north of India and brought home some Christian doctrines. This he considers to be supported by:-

a. The name of the White Island and the color of its inhabitants, so different from that of the Indians;

b. The ascription to these people of the worship of Unseen God, while the Indians of the same period had images of their deities;

c. The attribution to them of faith, the efficiency of which is not an ancient Indian tenet;

d. The value attributed to prayer, which is a less important element in Indian than in Christian rites; and

e. The fact that the doctrine which they learnt is described as one only made known to Indians at a late period."[2]

'Brahmanas' in their opinion should refer to the Indians since the very name itself is of late origin in the sociological background.

Lassen opines that Parthia was the country where the Indians met with Christian missionaries. Weber prefers Alexandria. According to Macnicol it probably refers to some Christian settlement to the north of India.

The above suppositions can be supported by the historical evidences of trade links that the Tamil country had with other parts of the world. In the time of the Roman Emperor Augustus there was a great development of India's trade with Rome. The Roman Empire imported pearls, the costliest animal product and thousands of other materials from the gulf of Mannar. Madurai and Uraiyūr had the chief pearl marts from whence the Roman merchants got it.

P.T. Srinivas Iyengar writes that

> "This trade grew to enormous proportion in the time of Claudius and Nero (54-68 A.D.) so that Pliny complained in 70 A.D. that India drained gold to the value of nearly a million pounds a year, "giving back her own wares, which are sold among us fully a hundred times their first cost."[3]

Romans, Greeks, Arabians, and people from Palestine were commonly known as 'Yavanas' in the Sangam poetry. Mullaippāṭṭu, Cilappatikāram, Maṇimēkalai etc. record about the Romans who were employed by the Tamil emperors as their bodyguards and soldiers. Mullaippāṭṭu, describes them that the Yavanas were strong and terrible looking and they wore beside a coat, a long piece of cloth hanging low and with many folds in which they concealed the whip with which horses were whipped.

Mattikai Vaḷaiyia marinṭuviñgu cerivuṭai

Meippai pukka veruvarun tōṟṟattu

Valipuṇar yākkai vaṉkaṇ yavanar.[4]

Therefore they acted as the gate-keepers of palaces and they were with dreadful swords, excellent guardians of the gates of the fort-walls.[5]

Millions of Roman coins were found in various parts of Tamil Nadu as well as in the north from Constantius upwards, increasing in the fourth and fifth centuries, and Constantine received an Indian Ambassador in the last year of his life, while Julian (aggressive in the East like Trajan before him) received Ambassadors from various oriental peoples, including Indian tribes.[6]

According to historians there was a Roman colony in Madurai. The author of Periplus says

"that from the southern part of the East coast, large vessels called Colandia, sailed to the Ganges and to Chryse (probably Burma, then called Suvaṇṇabhūmi). There are imported into these places everything made into Damirike[7], and the greatest part of what is imported at any time from Egypt comes here, together with all kinds of things that are brought from Damirike and of those that are carried through Paralia (Travancore Coast)".[8]

In addition to the historical accounts there are numerous literary evidences in Tamil to show the migration of religious, philosophic ideologies etc. from either side, i.e., Tamil Nadu and adjacent countries with the help of foreign trade. In the recent past many scholars have evinced keen interest in the comparative study of Indian religion and philosophy who have dug out the hoary past of the advent of Christianity in India before the arrival of the Europeans.

St. Thomas in India

We infer a great deal of accounts about the activities of the apostles of Jesus Christ from the apocryphal writings. According to them it was decided by the disciples to go to different countries to preach the gospel and St. Thomas was commissioned to go to India. John Samuel enumerates historical documentations that are associated with St. Thomas in India. "They are:

i) North Indian Tradition

ii) Malabar Tradition and

iii) Cholamandala (Coromandal) Tradition".[9]

St. Thomas is connected with Gondapharus, a king of Taxila. Millions of coins issued by Gondapharus have been excavated and these historical findings have disproved the earlier notion that Gondapharus was a mythical personality. 'Gospel of St. Thomas' and 'Acts of St. Thomas' are the important books that tell about the apostalic mission of St. Thomas.' The Acts of Judas Thomas' a book written in Syriac language in 3c. AD. is held as the first book which elaborates about the advent of Thomas in India and his mission. 'Didascalia' is another book in Syriac which tells that India had welcomed St. Thomas. Syrian poet St. Ephrem had composed many poems on St. Thomas. He had accounted for the martyrdom and burial of St. Thomas in India. The historical evidences assert the traditions linked with St. Thomas that he lived in Mylapore (Chennai) and used to preach the gospel in Little Mount and was skewered to death at St. Thomas Mount and was burried in Mylapore where the San Thome Bascillica stands today.

Tamil traditions also hold that Mylapore was the birth place of Thiruvalluvar who composed 'Thirukkural'. Some eminent scholars

are of the opinion that Thiruvalluvar would have encountered St. Thomas and as a result Thirukkural reflects the Christian doctrines. Though there is no historical evidence to prove that Thiruvalluvar had met St. Thomas, scholars have unearthed ample internal evidences from Thirukkural to show that it is a Christian ethical literature. Thirukkural was instrumental for the development of the Bhakti Movement which in turn had given rise to Saivism and Vaiṣṇavism.

Etymology of the word Viṣṇu

The name Viṣṇu is a derivative of the Tamil word 'Viṇ' which means the sky. The letter 'u' is suffixed with the root word 'Viṇ' and is pronounced as 'Viṇṇu' in the spoken language like maṇ > maṇṇu. Devaneyan explains:

"that the Sanskrit word Viṣṇu is a corrupt form of the Tamil word Viṇ. This refers to the cloud as well as the sky and the word 'Viṇṭu' which is derived from the above also refers to Thirumāl".[10]

Viṇ > Viṇṇu > Viṇṭu > Viṣṇu

Kambar employs the name Viṇṭu for Viṣṇu in his *magnum opus* Ramayana.

"Viṇṭu Kālināl aḷanta Vāṉa mukaṭṭaiyum"[11]

J. Przyluski contends that the word is 'pre-Aryan' and that is should be connected with the non-Aryan 'Viṇ'-(Sky). The puranas hold that the word means 'who enters or pervades (viz. the Universe).[12]

Vaiṣṇavism, a Dravidian Religion

Vaiṣṇavism is a religion of the Dravidians basically which originated from the background of the Tamils. Viṣṇu of Vaiṣhavite religion is not a Vedic deity as is claimed by some scholars. Vedic Viṣṇu is the name of the Sun – the long strides which he takes, and the three steps by which he measures the universe, are always described with enthusiasm.[13]

The three strides of Viṣṇu are the rise, the zenith point and fall of sun. In Ṛg Vēda Viṣṇu appears as the comrade and helper of Indra and he was only "in the subordinate position".[14] Viṣṇu was a minor deity in the Vēdic pantheon and the Ṛg Vēda has referred to him merely as a 'protector of cows'.[15]

Indira Parthasarathy observes that,

"Viṣṇu was, perhaps, one such god, who was 'faintly heard', during the Ṛg Vēdic period, but gained supremacy over the Aryan gods, because of His basic syncretistic character."[16]

He further quotes a few foreign scholars to show that Viṣṇu is of a pre-Aryan origin.

"Scholars like Przyluski, Ruben and Kuiper have given linguistic evidences to prove the pre-Aryan origin of word Viṣṇu; and armed with this view, the present study approaches the subject in the background of Tamil literature, which substantiates the stand taken by the western scholars".[17]

He holds pre-Aryan natives as Dravidians and he emphasizes that

"Vaiṣṇavism is a product of the Tamil soil".[18]

It should be noted at this juncture that Nālayira Tivyap Prabaṇtam is named as 'Dravida Vēdam' and Nammāḻvār's pāsurams are known as 'Dravida Mābhāṣya'. The Tamil hymns of āḻwars were very significant for Ramanuja which, infact, helped him in developing Visiṣṭādvaitam and in spreading Vaiṣṇavism. The Vaiṣṇava bhakti movement consists of twelve āḻwars, all of them hailed from Tamil Nadu; They composed the Nālayiram pāsurams in the Tamil language; Out of 108 'Divya dēsams' (Temples) 96 are in Tamil Nadu; Visiṣṭādvaita the Vaiṣṇavite theology originated from Tamil Nadu and Dvaita another Vaiṣṇavite theology from Karnataka, a part of Dravidian state. All these are suffice to say that Vaiṣṇavism is a Dravidian religion.

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Bible and Vaiṣṇavism

H emchandra Raychaudhuri says:

"We have no evidence of the existence of a Vaiṣṇava sect in these early times. .... We should also note another important fact, namely, that there is very little inner connection between Vedic and Brāhmanic Viṣṇu worship and the Bhakti religion we call Vaiṣṇavism".[19]

He therefore puts a question:

"If the Vedic or Brahmanic accounts of Vishṇu worship do not furnish any clue to the origin of Vaiṣṇavism as we know it, what is its source?"[20]

The scholars who undertake Indological studies normally tend to trace those aspects in the Aryan Vedas and they feel much comfortable to say that they are Vedic or Brāhmanical. But only a handful of scholars surge ahead to surpass these types of inclination and compare it with 'other' religious tenets and their origins.

Siva is the Supreme God according to Saivism. The other nomenclatures for Siva are 'Tīvaṇṇan', 'centaḷaḷōn', 'cēyon' etc. are associated with fire. In the Old Testament God appeared to

Moses in the form of fire only, when he came to Horeb from the wilderness.[21] Later on when Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain and

> "Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire".[22]

In the same way the source of Viṣṇu may be traced in the Old Testament. The Old Testament tells that God exhibited His valour, might, power and grace in the forms of 'pillar of fire' and 'pillar of cloud'. When the people of Isreal were led out of capitivity from Egypt, God led their way in the pillar of fire during might and by the pillar of cloud during day.[23] It is mentioned in the Bible that God descended in the cloud.

> "And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord".[24]

God used to speak to Moses in the tabernacle from the pillar of cloud.

> "as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses".[25]

It is evident from the Biblical passages that God encountered Moses and Israelites in the form of 'pillar of fire' and 'pillar of cloud'.

This is how the perception of God is depicted in the religious literature in Tamil.

As Lord Siva is mentioned with the epithet 'Aḷalvaṇṇan' and 'Tīvaṇṇan', so Lord Viṣṇu has the epithet as 'Mēgavaṇṇan', 'Mēgan' etc. Māṇikkavacagar hails the Lord as

"Karu mā muhilil tōn̲r̲i"[26]

"An̲t̲at tar̲umperan̲ mēgan vāl̲ka"[27]

'Māyōn' is mentioned as the pastoral deity in Tolkāppiyam and in his commentary Naccin̲ārkkin̲iyar interprets the word 'māyōn' as 'one who has the complexion of sea'.[28] His complexion is indicated as 'māya van̲n̲an' in Patir̲r̲uppattu,[29] while Siva is conceived as having the complexion of red, Viṣṇu is conceived as having the complexion of blue, sky-colour; dark etc. This conception of Dravidian thought has given rise to the prominent avatars of Viṣṇu like Rama and Kr̥ṣṇa who are invariably picturised in blue or with dark complexion.

A close survey of the Can̄kam literature clearly shows that the names Sivan, Sivam and Viṣṇu do not occur and they are a later conception founded in the era of Christ. The origin and development of the Tamil Bhakti Movement is traced only during the 5th c. A.D. and the major religions like Saivism and Vaiṣṇavism are the outcome of the Bhakti movement. Since the later part of the 20th Century many contemporary scholars have come out with a new finding that the gospel of Jesus Christ only had propelled the origin of the Bhakti Movement to gain momentum with the cultural background of the Dravidians. Their findings are not superfluous but are based on indepth analysis with historical and comparative approach. The ensuing analysis with special reference to Vaiṣṇavism shall throw much light to reveal the fact that Christianity and Vaiṣṇavism are not different entities but are founded on the same dogmatic tenets.

Viṣṇu and Holy Spirit

Western theologians normally accept the fact that it is a Himalayan task to explain the doctrine of Trinity. The church history

reveals that it had constituted many councils to formulate the Trinitarian theology.

In 325 A.D. the council of Nicea promulgated an official formula known as Nicean Creed and this council took place in the context of Arian controversy. To cite another formula promulgated by the First Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. where the nature of the Holy Spirit is explained rather elaborately.[30]

The Indian conception of Trimūrti or the Triune God is explained with mythological stories. Brahma, Viṣṇu and Siva are the Trimūrtis among whom Viṣṇu, the 'god of preservation', is interpreted as a male god and a female god by two different denominations viz. Vaiṣṇavism and Saivism. The concept of 'Arthanāri' is the combination of Siva and Sakti, i.e., half male and half female. The Tamil word 'Sakti' is translated in English as spirit. For the Saivites, Sakti is the female form and for the Vaiṣṇavites it is the male form and hence they call it by the name Viṣṇu.

Maraimalai Adikal emphatically writes:

"There were not much differences between Saivism and Viṣṇavism till 8th.C. AD. during the period of the Saivite saints and first two āḻwars and people of both the religions were worshipping both Siva and Viṣṇu".[31]

The Tamil proverb

"Ariyum Civamum oṇṇu
Aṟiyār vāyil maṇṇu"

was very popular among the common people of Tamil Nadu in these days. The masculine name 'Aran' for Siva was employed as 'Ari' to refer to Vīṣṇu in the feminine gender and further was corrupted as 'Hari' with Sanskrit sabdam. The poem of Peiāḻwar in Mūnṟām Tiruvantāti is worth its mention here:

Tālsaṭaiyum nēlmuṭiyum oṇmaluvum cakkaramum
Cūlaravum poṇṇāṇum tōnṭumāl – culum
Tiraṇṭaruvi pāyum tirumalaimēl entaikku
Iranṭuruvum oṉrai icaiṇṭu.[32]

Poikai, one among the three early alwars, also sang in the same manner.

Pontikalum mēnip puricaṭaiem puṇṇiyaṇum
Ninṭulakat tāya netu mālum – entum
Iruvarankaṭṭal tirivarēnum oruvaṉ
Oruvaṉaṅkat tenṛum uḻan.[33]

Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār in her Arputattiruvantāti sings:

"Orupāl ulakaḻanta Mālavaṉām maṟṛai
Orupāl umaiyavaḻām eṉṛāl – irupālum
Niṉṉuru vamāka niranṭeriya māṭṭēmāl"

Sambantar also mentions in the following manner,

"Ariyalāl tēvi illai ayyanaiyāṛa nāṛkē"

in Tēvāram.

Maraimalai Adikal observes that we never come across any poem composed by Poikaiālwar and Pēiālwar discrediting Siva. The later alwars like Tirumaṅkai, Tirumaḻicai and Nammālwar only had attempted to degrade Siva in their poems. He observes further that this trend had been set in motion after 8th C.A.D. after the Purāṇās were fabricated by the Brahmins with an ulterior motive of disintegrating the Tamils and to estrange the Saivites and the Vaiṣṇavites.[34] Lord Siva is considered as the 'God of Sūdras' even to this date.

'The mythological suppositions about Siva, Sakti, Viṣṇu, Murukan, Pillaiyār, Brahman and Ayyappan have been rationalized

with theological propositions — Siva as God the Father, Sakti and Viṣṇu as the Holy Spirit, Murukan Pillaiyar, Brahman and Ayyappan as God the Son. According to Christianity, Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit which had given room to treat the Holy Spirit as male. The rationalization as how to engender the Holy Ghost in the Dravidian conception was the result of treating 'Sakti' as a female by the Saivites and a male (Viṣṇu) by the Vaiṣṇavites in the six-fold religion.[35] The Trinitarian dogma in the Indian background was proliferated into the sixfold religion and the different names of God gave an impression to the minds of the common people as a pantheon of gods. A close analysis of the above study has shed more light on the understanding of the Trinitarian dogmatic theology in the Indian context.

2

Trinity in Vaiṣṇavism

It has been outlined in the previous paragraphs how Viṣṇu was mythicized as a person of Trinity. A deeper analysis of Vaiṣṇavite dogmatics reveal much more about the Triune God and His nature. The divine Godhead is an infinite personality for all perfections are in Him. He is the embodiment of love and perfection and in Him there is neither imperfection nor cruelty. Because of His supreme love He was born in this world as a human being and had imparted the perfect ways to the human beings and he himself had set an example.

The basic three tattuvas of Vaiṣṇavism are cit, acit and Īswara. Acit (non-sentient) constitutes the body of cit, and Īswara has as His body cit (sentient) and acit together. These three never perish and depend on each other for their relevance and existence.

Trinity in the poems of āḻwars are lucidly expounded. A few of them are given below:

"Mūvaril Yeñkaḷ mūrti"[36]

"Mūvarākiya Oruvaṉai"[37]

"Mutalāvār mūvarē"[38]

"Mūvarakiya mūrti"[39]

Ōruruvam poṉṉuruvam; Oṉṟu ceṉṯē
Oṉṟumā kaṭal uruvam ottuniṉṟa
Mūvuruvuum kaṇṭapō toṉṟām cōti
Mukiluruvam emmaṭikal uruvantāṉē"[40]

These are comprehended in the Vaiṣṇavite theology as 'Mūrti Bhedās'or the forms of the Supreme God. It emphasizes that these forms of God are to be known and realized for the purpose of an integral knowledge.

K.C. Varadachari writes:

"God is not only Transcendent (Para). He is also the God who is the creator, sustainer and destroyer – redeemer, the Lord of all processes and ruler of all the categories (Vyuhas). He is the indewelling self (antaryāmi) of all souls and Nature. He is in addition to these triunity or trinity (of Absolute, God and Self) the Historically descending Godhead for the redemption and rescue of saints and good men and for the establishment of righteous (dharma) and annihilation of adharma and evil (Avatār). These four poises of the Absolute, who is God and self and Avatār, are true and perfect and make God what He is. And in addition Sri Ramanuja intimated a fifth poise known to the Mystics to whom the Divine in His infinite compassion reveals Himself in an effulgent form for worship and adoration (arca)."[41]

The following five forms of God are explained in the above analysis.

1. Para Swarupa   -   Transcending Form
2. Vibhava Swarupa   -   Incarnated Form

3. Vyūha Swarupa	-	Emanated Form (Grouped Form)
4. Arcāvatāra Swarupa	-	Adorable Form
5. Antaryāmi Swarupa	-	Immanent Form

Though five forms have been enumerated here basically they are the explanation of the triune nature of God. It is explained:

"Para Swarupa signifies the Almighty of Omnipotence and Omnipresence — the form of Creator that surpasses everything. Vibhava is the incarnated form of God and Arca is the Adorable form, the iconic representation which signifies the Lord who came into this world embodied Himself as a human being for the salvation of the world. Vyuha concept was introduced during the Puranic Age for the purpose of deifying the mythical heroes. The members of the Vrishni family were thus deified in the North India. So, Vyuha, Vibhava and Arca are to be clubed as one which invariably expounds the doctrine of incarnation only".[42]

The formulation of the Vyuha concept basically the worship of the heroes and kings which were prevalent after 1st c.A.D.had paved the way for apotheosizing them, as a consequence these personalities were adorned with godliness and the ingredients of divinity. Suvira Jaiswal says that it has been accepted, after analyzing certain inscriptions which are associated with Vyuha concept, are later than 1st c.A.D.[43]

The analytical condensation of the five forms of the One Supreme God in Vaiṣṇavism is analogous with Saivism and Christianity. The following table illustrates this.[44]

Trinity

Trinity	Saivism	Vaiṣṇavism	Christianity
Formless	Param	Para Swarupam	God the Father
With Form	Aparam	Vibhava Swarupam Vyuha Swarupam Arcāvatāra Swarupam	God the Son
Semi Form	Paraparam	Antaryāmi	God the Holy Spirit

In the course of its development Vaiṣṇavism had assimilated the worship of the Sātvatas, Bhagavatās, Pāncarātra, Krṣṇa cult, sectarian worships etc. into its stream. To cite an example, the Varaha — worship was prevalent and was popular in the Gupta period. This type of sectarian worship was blended with the doctrine of trinity. D.A.G. Rao points out that Varaha Avatara of Viṣṇu consists of three forms viz. Bhuvarāhā or Āti Varāhā, Yajña Varāhā and Pralaya Varāhā.[45] Āti Varāhā connotes the beginning — Ātimūlam (Creator), Yajña Varāhā is the sacrificial form — Jesus was the historical sacrifice and Pralaya Varāhā signifies the spirit of God.[46]

Scholars have pointed out that the doctrine of Trinity in Indian religions was the outcome of the Christian doctrine. An eminent scholar points out:

"The outstanding contribution of Christianity to this world is the doctrine of Triune God. The invisible God in the 'Arūpa' state was born in this world as a man with five

sensory organs and showed the path of righteousness to the human beings. It was due to the spirit of God, who was the embodiment of grace, God came into this world as an earthly babe and it was due to this spirit the humanity could be united with God who descended into this world as a Guru."[47]

Naturally the Triune God of Vaisnavism is based on the Triune God of New Testament and this "Trinitarian revelation seems to indicate that reality is fundamentally neither one nor many but one in many and many in one".[48]

Avatar and Incarnation

The Sanskrit term 'avatar' is a compound word with the prefix 'ava' and the verb 'tar'

"Ava+tar = Avatar

'Ava' is the prefix which means down; and
'tar' coming down, the process of coming down".[49]

Ishanand Vempeny writes:

"Avatāra is a compound word consisting of the prefix 'ava' which means down, away etc. and the verbal root 'tr' which means to save, to carry across or beyond. 'Avatara' is then rightly translated by 'descent' and the one who descends is called Avatāri, Avatārin and often in worth simply by the term Avatār".[50]

'Incarnation' is derived from the Latin verb 'incarnari' and is formed by the terms 'in' which means in, into and 'caro' which means flesh. English dictionary gives the meaning for incarnation as enfleshment.

"Incarnation — to be made flesh.

In — in and caro

carnis — flesh.

Incarnation is a Latin derivative; the verb 'incarnari' means enfleshment."[51]

In the early days, the term incarnation was used to refer to the birth of Jesus Christ. The Oxford Universal Dictionary explains:

"The Incarnation — the earliest sense — In early use often in reference to the date of birth of Christ".[52]

The Webster's dictionary's explanation with regard to incarnation is noteworthy — (i) "the endowment with human body; appearance in human form; (ii) taking on of human form and nature of Jesus conceived of as 'Son of God'."[53]

Scholars have enumerated many terms which have been used to refer to the concept of 'avatār' — 'pradhurbava', 'vibhava', 'Divyamjanma' (Gita) etc. A few authors like Rudolf Otto, H.H. Farmer, Aldous Huxley have dealt with avatārs and incarnation and have commented about their similarities and dissimilarities. Many scholars believed that the Aryan Vedas were the most ancient religious writings and they only had given birth to the ideologies of Hindu religion: In fact Vedas do not belong to the Indian soil and the pantheon of gods of the Aryan Vedas are alien to the people of India. In this context Sesha Iyengar observes that it would be appropriate to call the Indian religion as Dravidian religion and the gods of Hinduism namely Siva, Kūṣṇa, Rāmā and Durgā are unknown to the Vedas; and the Vedas are not adumbrated with the concept of avatar.[54]

In fact the concept of avatar is the centrality of Vaiṣṇavism. There is no consistency as far as the number of avatars of Viṣṇu is

concerned. A few later texts, many of them of the Pāñcarātra school have been at pains to fix the number of avatārs which gradually came to be stereotyped as 'ten' (Dasavataras). Jitendra Nath Banerjea says:

"The Nārāyaṇiya section of the Mahābhārata refers in one list (XII, 349, 37) to the Varaha, the Vāmana, the Narasiṃha and the 'Man' incarnations. The human incarnations refer, no doubt, to Vāsudēva – Krṣṇa, Bhārgava Rāma and Dāsarathi Rama, for in Chapter 389 (Verses 77-90) of the same section not only the stories about the first three in the list given above are briefly narrated, but also those about his incarnations as Bhārgava Rāma (Parasurāma), Dāsarathi Rama and Vāsudeva - Krṣṇa are recounted. But the fullest list of incarnations in Verse 104 of the same Chapter."[55]

He observes further that the,

"Bhāgavata Puraṇā enumerates the Avatars thrice; in the first recounting (I.3, 6-22), the number is 22, in the second (II.7, 1 ff), 23, and in the third (IX.4, 3 ff.), 16."[56]

"The Matsyapurāṇa (Ch. 47 v, 46) lays down that Viṣṇu was born seven times among men because he was cursed by Bhrgu for killing his wife, the mother of Sukra".[57]

The account given by Matsyapurāṇa is interesting because the concept of avātar suffers by its doctrinal construction. The rebirth theories of Buddhism and Jainism probably had given birth to such mythologizing which had not even spared the 'so-called' Supreme God Viṣṇu to bear the brunt of the curse. Perhaps Viṣṇu was not elevated to the Supreme state at this point of time. Schrader had

attempted to identify many of these avatars on the basis of Purāṇic and other enumerations.

It has also been pointed out,

"some of the later saṃhitās like Ahirbudhanya and Visvaksena distinguish between primary (mukhya) and secondary (gauṇa, āveśa) Avatars. The latter says that the primary ones are like flame issuing from a flame (Viṣṇu himself with aprākrta body), while the secondary ones are souls in bondage with a prākrta body which is possessed (āviṣṭa) for some particular mission or function by Sakti of Viṣṇu".[58]

The process of permutation and combination in the avatar theory had given room for bewilderment in the religious scenario of India. In Vaiṣṇavism the creation of the universe is related with 'Yugāvatārs'. Krēta, Trēta, Tvāpara and Kali are the four Yugās. Bhagavad Gita says:

"Restoring to my Prakriti, I again and again send forth the whole multitude of beings, powerless under the control of Prakriti".[59]

Another constituent of avatar concept is Kalāvatāra. 'Kala' in Sanskrit means a part of the whole. 'Kala' may vary from avatar to avatār and according to the increase in the number of 'Kala' that avatār is construed as superior to the other avatārs. These types of varience at the hands of the myth-makers ended up in corruption to the core.

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Purose of Avatar
and Incarnation

Redemption is the central motive of divine incarnation. While commenting on Visistātvaita, P.N. Srinivasachari observes that 'greater is the intensity of God's love to redeem the soul than the soul's desire to see God. For this purpose the transcending Brahman puts on the human form to unite with His devotee'.[60] He further writes that 'Īsvara descends into this world and redeems the mankind and He restores the lost soul'.[61]

Vaiṣṇavism expounds that it is out of love and abundant grace of God, He wants to descend among the mundane world as a man to live amongst the human beings and to restore the lost glory.

Gita says:

"Yata Yata hi dharmasya glanir pavati Bharata
Abhyuttānam adharmasya tadhātmānam srjamyaham"[62]

(Whenever there is a decline of Dharma, O Arjuna, and uprising of Adharma, then I incarnate myself).[63]

In the next verse the Gita says:

"Paritrāṇāya sāthunāṃ vinachaya dhuśkrtam
Dharmasamstāpa nartāya sambavami yuge yuge"[64]

(For the protection of the good and also for the destruction of the
wicked, for the establishment of Dharma,
am I born from age to age).[65]

The uprising of Adharma is the cause for God's incarnation
(Gita IV.7); the annihilation of the wicked is the next motive and also
the purpose of the incarnation is to protect the good and the last
element of avatara is to establish dharma.

It is clearly earmarked in the avatar doctrine that 'the goal
becomes the guide so as to liberate the mankind.

Ishanand Vempeny writes:

"He is not only the way but also the 'Vehicle' and
this is the central purpose of avatara. Otherwise it is difficult
to understand the intimate connection the Lord points out
between his 'janma-karma' and man's salvation".[66]

Aurobindo has built up his theory of man's ascent through the
divine descent. It is through the expression 'madbhavamagatah' of
the Gita, Aurobindo has mainly relied on the verses 4:9-11 of the
Gita. The human ascent does not refer to the rising of human to the
supreme state of God but it conveys a vital position of the humanity,
which hitherto was suffering in a state of captivity, was liberated
from its sinful nature and the Divine descent has endowed the
humanity with a new nature to live in bliss with God Himself. Indeed
this is the real ascension of man unlike Sankara's advaitic philosophy
of 'Aham Brahmasmi'.

According to Christians, Jesus Christ in his very being and
mission is 'Saviour'. This is what the name Jesus precisely means.

God conveyed the name Jesus to Mary through Gabriel even before Jesus was conceived.[67] The fundamental idea behind Christian salvation is that every man is born in bondage to sin so he cannot liberate himself without divine intervention. It is because of the disobedience of Adam, the whole of his descendants (generations) were cursed-

> "I will put enmity between you and the women,
> and between your seed and her seed;
> he shall bruise your head,
> and you shall bruise his heel".[68]

The above verse indicates that 'her seed'-the mankind as a whole shall be cursed but the second part of the verse promises about the redemption-'he shall bruise your head'.

St. John calls Jesus Christ as the 'saviour of the the world'.[69] Both God the Father and Son Jesus Christ are designated by St. Paul as 'saviour'.[70] It is obvious that salvation according to the New Testament is achieved by God's own initiative through Christ.

The prayer of Nammāḻvār lucidly elucidates why God had incarnated in this mundane world thus:

> Poinniṉṟa ñānamuṃ pollā oḷukkum aḷukkuṭambum
> Inniṉṟa nirmai iniyām uṟāmai uyir aḷippān
> Enniṉṟa Yōniyu maippiṟan tāi,imai yortalaivā
> Meinniṉṟu Kēṭṭaru lāiadi yēnceyyum viṇṇappamē."[71]

The phrase 'uyir aḷippan' signifies 'to give a lease of life'-and Nammāḻvār praises the incarnated God had taken birth not only to redeem the mankind but to put an end to the recurrence of this state (Ini yām uṟāmai).

It may be out of context here to deal with the stories of Dasāvatara. However all these mythologies are interwoven with the main theme of salvation — to redeem earth (Matsya, Kūrma, varaha etc.) and to give salvation to mankind (Vāmana, Narasimha, Krṣna etc.). The celestial avatar Kalki is regarded as the future avatar like the second coming of Jesus in Christianity. The apocalyptic writings in the Book of Revelation visualizes about the 'Word of God' (Jesus) was seated upon an white horse[72] and "the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God, the Almighty."[73] The inclusion of the historical personality, the Buddha in Dasāvatāra was done with an ulterior motive of eradicating it from the Indian soil. S. Radhakrishnan writes:

> "When the Brahminical inculcated universal love and
> devotion to God and proclaimed Buddha to be the avatar
> of Viṣṇu the death knell of Buddhism was sounded."[74]

In the same way there was a futile attempt to include Jesus Christ as an avatar of Viṣṇu. Salvation being the central aspect of avatar doctrine, it is related to sin or bondage and release or Mukti. In the ensuing lines we shall try to analyse these points in the line of Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity.

Bondage (sin)

According to Bagavad Gita, a constituent of Vaiṣṇavite scriptures, the 'jīvātman' is the 'amsa' of the Lord. But it is different from saying that this 'amsa' is the total reality that the 'Paramātman' is. Bagavad Gita affirms real distinction between 'jīvātman' and 'Paramātman'. The Bible tells that man was created in the image of God.

"God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."[75]

It is this 'image' (in the Bible) and 'amsa' (in the Gita) makes the relationship of man with God. Gita also affirms that man is constitutionally in bondage, born in bondage. This in Saiva Siddhānta is termed as 'sakaja malam'-the sin that clings on to a person from his birth. The theologians of the New Testament call it as 'original sin' or 'Adam's sin'. But neither Saivism nor Vaiṣṇavism elaborates how and when this bondage came into being.

The Āḷvars make references to this aspect of bondage in their hymns.

"Pāramāya palavinai parraruttu ennaittan
Vāramākki Vaittān vaittanri ennul pukuntān
Kōra mātavam ceitanankol lariyēn Arankattammān tiru
Āramāvatu anrō āṭkoṇtātē"[76]
"Piravittuyarara ñānattuḷ ninṟu"[77]
"Cārṇta iruval vinaikaḷum
carittu māyap parraruttu"[78]
"Tol vinai tīralārum"[79]
"Perumaiyuṭaiya pirānār – irumai vinai kaḷivarē"[80]

It is significant for our study about 'Iru valvinai', 'irumai vinai' that we come across in the above poems. It is usual for the commentators to give the meaning for the above terminology as 'Nal vinai' and 'Tīvinai'. If it is accepted as 'nalvinai' and 'tīvinai' we will be confronted with the flow of ideologies of Tiruvaḷḷuvar.

Tiruvaḷḷuvar writes in his kuṟal:

"Iruḷcēr iruvinaiyum cērā Iṟaivan
Poruḷcēr pukaḻpurintār māṭṭu."[81]

'Iruḷ' in Tamil is conceived as hell. It is acceptable to hold that 'tīvinai' shall propel a person into the hades but how would it be correct if we hold that 'nalvinai'-the good deeds also shall lead him into hell? Now the scholars have given a new interpretation for 'iruvinai' which means the 'original sin' and the 'individual sin'.

The original sin is pointed out by the terms 'paḻa vinai', 'piṛavittuyar', 'tol vinai' etc. Philosophy uses the words 'avidya', 'ajñāna', neiscience etc. to refer to the above sin. Bhagavad Gita says:

"Ajñānēna jñanam āvrtam"[82]

(Knowledge is covered with ignorance).

Gita uses the word 'jamma bhandam'[83] for the original sin. This 'janma bhandam' is usually misinterpreted as 'rebirth'. As has been pointed out earlier the concept of 'rebirth' is a belief propounded by the atheistic philosophies of Buddhism and Jainism. The other bondage according to Gita is 'karma bhandam'[84] or 'karma bhandanam'.[85]

Since Adam rebelled against God by the act of his disobedience he was cursed and in him the whole creation was also cursed and man was disinherited by Him. God did not abandon man to his own fate but promises him victory. It is pointed out:

"According to the New Testament, if Adam disfigured God's image by his sin, Christ the "second Adam" would reconstitute the image through a new creation (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45-49). According to the NT Christ is the image par excellence of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:2) and by union with him man's image, distorted by sin, is made whole."[86]

The saving grace of God is expounded, we can say, in the mythology of Lord Siva consuming poison, Lord Viṣṇu taking 'kūrmāvatāra' while the ocean of milk was churned in order to get elixir and the suffering Bhodisatvā. The doctrine of 'Vēhi' and 'kāmāri rūpa' in Saivism reveal the 'suffering God' mainly to liberate the mankind.

The complex process of other type of bondage is explained in Gita II. 62-63.

"To a man thinking about sense-objects there arises attachment to them; from attachment arises desire, from desire arises anger; from anger there comes delusion; from delusion, the loss of memory, the destruction of discrimination; and with the destruction of discrimination, he is lost."[87]

The fruits of sinful behaviour of the individuals are obvious and they have to be abandoned with the help of God because according to the āḻvār God Himself is the medicine with which the 'vinai' (bondage) will be cured- 'Vinaiyēn vinai tīr maruntānāi"[88]

'Vinaitīr maruntu' is a metaphorical expression in the religious background and it has a thematic proximity with 'Tavam'. According to Thiruvaḷḷuvar 'tavam' means,

"Taṉṉuyir tāṉṉarap perutal"[89]

'Tavam' in Tamil religious literature connotes 'sacrifice'. It cannot be equiated with the penance of the sages who undertake it for personal gains. The divine penance excels the human efforts and it suprasses self-centredness-the Lord of Creation of this universe empties Himself of the heavenly glories and chooses the path of suffering so as to redeem the mankind. This suffering aspect

of salvific function and the sacrifice of the incarnate God is known as 'tavam'. To quote from Saiva Siddhānta,

'Aimpula vēṭarin ayarntaṉai vaḷarnteṉat
Tammutal Guruvu māi tavattiṉil uṉartta".[90]

The first line of the above aphorism conveys that God incarnated as a human being and He came as a guru and the next line emphasizes that He taught the mankind through the act of His 'tavam' which means His sacrifice. This aspect is conveyed through the lines of āḷvar quoted above elsewhere,

"Pāramāya paḷaviṉai paṭraṟuttu ennaittaṉ

··· ··· ··· ··· ··· ··· ··· ···

Kōra mātavam ceitaṉaṉ"[91]

This 'mātavam' has an epithet of 'Kōra' which means great suffering and it refers to the sacrifice of God so as to redeem the people from the fetters of 'pāramāya paḷaviṉai'-the original sin.

Bhakthi

Bhakti implies the conception of the deity as a person with whom man can have relationship; it is infact a personal relationship with God. The nature of bhakti is love which culminates in direct communion with the divine. Friedhelm Hardy puts bhakti this way:

"This bhakti, a completely unintellectual devotion, a continuous flow of emotional religiosity ... animated the religious life of the Vaiṣṇavas, eversince it had founded its superb expression in the poetry of Gita."[92]

The Supreme God loses His transcendence and formlessness and descends as a human being with a view to have relationship with man. Now bhakti comes into its own as love within a personal

relationship between man and God. This love of God for man is portrayed by St. John in his gospel as,

> "For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life".[93]

In bhakti it is the love of God which plays the primary role that makes the man to reciprocate with love, humility and reverence. In the doctrine of avatar the dual phenomenon of divinity blended with humanity is exhibited. Therefore it is required of everybody to love God as well as to love the fellow men. When the Pharisees came to Jesus and a lawyer put a question about the great commandment, Jesus said to him,

> "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind."
> "This is the great and first commandment."
> "And a second is-like it, your shall love your neighbor as yourself."[94]

Bhakti is not the devotion or love that is shown to God alone but to translate that love into action. We shall cite here the observation of Vempeny:

> "the bhakti advocated in the Bhagavad Gita is essentially surrender to God with the totality of one's person, with one's body, mind and heart."[95]

In addition to bhakti the āḻvars have introduced a new path known as 'prapatti'.

Prapatti

In the observation of Indira Parthasarathy,

"The only requisite for 'prapatti' is the change of heart on the part of the devotee and his absolute confidence in the saving Grace of God."[96]

F. Hardy points out that 'prapatti' is an alternative to bhakti.

"In fact Srivaiṣṇavism makes it quite clear that bhakti is the strenuous affair of Yoga exercises, and introduces an 'easier' alternative prapatti, 'surrender in love'."[97]

Bhakti and Prapatti are not the basic doctrines of Vedic worship. Hemchandra Raychandhuri observes:

"The idea of a God of Grace, the doctrine of Bhakti-these are the fundamental tenets of the religion termed Vaiṣṇavism. But they are not very conspicuous in Vedic-Brāhmaṇic Viṣṇu worship. Viṣṇu in Brāhmaṇic texts is more intimately connected with 'yajña' than with Bhakti or Prasāda."[98]

The ideology of 'prapatti' or complete surrender to God is exemplified with the help of two similies. According to Vaṭakalai Vaisnavites, just as the young one of the monkey, how it catches hold of its mother the devotee should catch hold of God through his own efforts. This 'monkey theology' is 'markaṭa nyāya'. The other one is to surrender oneself unto the Lord like a kitten how it commits itself to its mother to be carried away where ever the cat wishes to carry its offspring. This 'cat theology' is advocated by the Teṉkalai Vaiṣṇavites.

According to Visiṣṭādvaita, the sum total of Vaiṣṇavism is prapatti. In Gita we read,

"mām ekam saraṇam vraja ... mā sucaḥ!"[99]
(Come to me alone for refuge. Do not worry!)

Tirumaḻicai āḻvar in Tiruccantaviruttam sings,

"ninraṉakku aṭaikkalam pukuntav
eṉṉai añcal eṉṉa vēṇṭumē"[100]

F. Hardy writes,

"Aṭaikkalam and śaraṇāgati will be synonyms of 'prapatti'."[101]

The verse of Matthew is echoed in the Gita quoted above. Jesus said,

"come to me, all who labour and are heavy-ladden, and I will give you rest."[102]

Saraṇāgati according to Pauline writings is to surrender our sensory organs to God. He writes:

"Do not yield your members to sin as instruments to wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness."[103]

In the epistle to Galatians St. Paul writes:

"it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me".[104]

A typical example of 'saraṇāgati' is exemplified in the above verse. Complete surrender to God is otherwise known as 'salvation by faith' in Christian terminology.

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Fulfilment of Sacrifice

The chief mode of Vedic worship was sacrifice or Yajña. The main trend of worship as practiced by the Vedic Aryans was polytheistic and kenotheistic or kathenotheistic in which sacrifice played the most important role, in fact, it was full of ritualistic acts which had for its objective the attainment of wealth and enjoyment in the world. There was little scope for deep meditation in his early rituals, his deities being hardly ever the objects of 'dhyana yoga'. These points of observation have to be borne in our mind and Jitendra Nath Banerjea remarks:

> "the early authoritative Brāhmanas, which lay down with meticulous details the mode of performing the various sacrifices, there is practically no reference to the idols of the gods, which would certainly have been explicitly mentioned if they were found necessary."[105]

and in the ensuing lines he quotes Keith saying,

> "Though it would be wrong to ignore the anthropomorphic character of the gods, the Vedic pantheon has none of the clearest figures of the Greek."[106]

Scholars like P.T. Srinivas Iyengar have pointed out that the worship and religious practices of Siva and Visnu are primarily Agamic which are basically built up on the edifice of Bhakti Mārga and Jñāna Marga. Both the Bhakti Mārga and Jñāna Marga are opposed to the Vedic sacrifices and fire rites.

Indira Parthasarathy quotes U. Rangacharya:

"The word 'Āgama' means 'mantra'. It denotes 'a popular cult, wherein practical religious rites and offerings in the form of fruits, flowers, food and drinks etc. are done with great devotion, substituting for incantations and sacrifices in fire'. This, in fact, establishes the triumph of the Dravidian thinking over the Aryan practice of sacrifice."[107]

Suffice is to claim that Vaisnavism is a non-Vedic, non-sacrificial religion. The Vaisnavite scriptures describe its Godhead as the real sacrifice. The age-old practice of bloody sacrifice is fulfilled by Visnu Himself. Therefore he is called as 'Yajña'.

Tirumankai ālvar sings:

"Vētamum vēlviyum vinnum iru cutarum

Ātiyum ānān".[108]

'Vēlvi' means sacrifice or yajña. The above lines explain that the 'He' (Visnu) is the very origin, the universe, the scripture and the sacrifice. In Bhagavad Gita, He is acclaimed as 'yajña'.

"cha atra thēhē aham ēva ati yajña:"[109]

'aham yajña'[110]

"Aham hi sarva yajñānām boktā"[111]

Bhāgavatapurāṇa enumerates various avatars of Viṣṇu and one among them is 'Yajña'.

The sacrificial worship is meant for God. The Aryan Vedic sacrifice, though it falls in line with this, the vedic worship is not monotheistic. Sacrifice was part of the worship and it was an act of expiation for man's sin or thanks giving-in the Old Testament days. But according to the New Testament God came into this world enfleshed as a human being so that he himself has become the sacrifice, i.e., the very purpose of incarnation was to liberate the mankind, through his act of self-sacrifice, from the clutches of Satan. Therefore God becomes the embodiment of sacrifice-'Aham 'yajña'.

5

Bridal Mysticism

God is love and He loves all mankind with a divine love. The mystic realizes expression of beauty of the Lord. Out of their mystic experiences the aḻvārs realized God as 'Bhuvana Sundara'. The human love of Caṅkan corpus of Akattiṇai had its influence on the Ālvār hymns, sublimated in the direction of divine love or nor is a subject to be re-examined. The passionately emotional songs of Āṇṭāḷ are 'girl songs' and her personal emotionalism is erotic. Scholars have pointed out that the 'gopi eroticism' in the Bhagavata Puraṇa are unworthy of a bhakti interpretation. F. Hardy quotes Hooper as under:

> "The Bhagavata Purana however appears to have gone further in the less worthy directions that are associated with the later bhakti movement than do the Ālvār hymns ... From the standpoint of religion it would appear to mark a perversion, which is by no means so definite in the Tamil works",[112]

The passionate hymns of Nammāḻvār, Āṇṭāḷ etc. are mostly the mystic hymns of Kṛṣṇāism than of Viṣṇuism. It is observed:

"When the sexual love is not humanised, it is bestial and when it is spiritualized into devine love, it loses all traces of selfishness. Love is a relation between the 'atman' and 'God' and longing for the communion".[113]

So Kūṣṇa the lover of the 'gopis' do not have its counterpart in the spiritual foundation of Christianity. F. Hardy points out:

"there does exist the Canticle. But the fundamental problem of this beautiful work (quite apart from the fact that scholars have not succeeded in explaining its original sitz im Leben) is that the Christ of New Testament cannot possibly be envisaged, according to common Christian sentiment, as acting out the content of the Canticle literally (as Kūṣṇa did with the gopis).[114]

In Pauline's writings Christ is described as the bridegroom and the church as the bride. The allegorical expressions – Christ loving the church or the soul in love with God may be worth mentioning here, 'Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her'.[115] The book of Revelation also gives references to this sort of allegory – Rev. 19:7, 21:9.

6

Development of Kṛṣṇaism

It was already pointed out that Vaiṣṇavism is a religious product of the Davidians. Scholars like Zvelebil affirm that 'the early poetry of Tamil is founded on a secular, oral bardic tradition.'[116]

The Caṅkam poetry reflects mostly the rites and ceremonies connected with the daily life of the people and also we come across the reflections of tribal cults and their ceremonies. The presence of Vedic worship, or Brāhmanism, in early Tamil poetry may not be traceable or the traces may be feeble. 'The greater bulk of extant Caṅkam poetry belongs to akam category, but also because it was akam, not puram, which was of importance in the formation of southern Kṛṣṇa bhakti.'[117]

A good amount of accounts relating to the Kṛṣṇa cult is available for our analysis. Endless arguments continue about the person Kṛṣṇa whether he is the same mentioned in the Ṛg Vēda, Upaniṣads, Mahabharata's Kshatriya prince, etc. In tracing the origin of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva cult the historians point out the Garuda column erected in honour of Vasudeva by Heliodorus, a Greek ambassador to King Kasiputra Bhagapatra of Besnagar in 200 BC. Which testifies

Vasudeva as 'deva deva'. Bandarkar writes that Vasudeva was the supreme deity of Bhāgavata religion. The garudadhvaja inscription refers to 'the Yavana devotee Heliodorus as the worshipper of Bhagavat' (Vāsudēva).[118] Bhagavata cult was in vogue during that period and the Vrṣṇi heroes Sankarshana, Anirudha and Pradyumna were included in the pantheon of deities of the Bhagavata religion around 2nd c. A.D.

For apotheosizing the Vrṣṇi heroes the Bhagavatas had devised the Vyuha concept. This was in continuation with the age old tradition of hero worship. According to this concept the Vūṣṇi heroes were regarded as emenations of the Lord and phases of the manifestation of the spirit. This ' Vyuha doctrine was an effort to integrate the doctrines of incarnation and hero worship.'[119] The names of the above heroes were written on the inscription of first century A.D. at Mora seven miles west of Mathura.[120] According to this epigraphic evidence, the Vyuha concept was developed after 1st c. A.D. This date has been attested by other authors also. Varadaraja Ayyar brings out the fact that 'Vyuha concept could not be traced in Bhagavad Gita'.[121]

It is observed that Narayana was integrated with Vāsudēva Krṣṇa during the period of Mahabharata (5th c. A.D. or later). It was due to the ceaseless efforts of the Būhaita Brahmins, Narayana was recognized with Viṣṇu and Narayana Viṣṇu was infused with Vāsudēva Krṣṇa.[122] The Nārāyaṇiya portion of Mahabharata is considered to be the first work which speaks about the concept of Vyuha.[123]

Bhagavad Gita refers God as 'Purusha' and Viṣṇu. 'The inscriptions which identifies the supreme God as 'Purusha' and Viṣṇu are dated as belonging to 5th or 6th c. A.D.'[124] 'It was during the period of Gupta many literary works related to Pāncarātra started

flourishing. According to Winternitz the Pāncarātra samhitas would have been compiled between 5th and 9th c. A.D. Schrader opines that they could have been compiled before the end of 8th c. A.D.'.[125] It is also pointed out that 'the inscriptions related to Vaiṣṇavism are not very much available'.[126] In the religion which is commonly known as Vaiṣṇavism, it was only in a very later period the element Viṣṇu was regarded as the supreme one'.[127]

The devotees who worship Narayaṇa-Viṣṇu Vāsudeva were named as Sātvatas, Bhāgavatas, Pāncarātras or Ekantins. According to Kūrmapurāṇa and Sāmbapurāṇa, the Bhagavatas and the Pāncaratras are regarded as anti-vedic. The Pāncarātras never accepted the Varṇāsrama but in course of time the Vedic recensions infiltrated into the Pāncarātra scriptures.

Tadpatrikan has indicated that the stories of Kṛṣṇa are first portrayed in Brahmapurāṇā. Kṛṣṇa in Sanskrit means black. In Tamil he is known as Kannan. Āṇṭal sings in praise of him as:

"Kaṇṇaṉ eṉṉum karunteivam"[128]

'Though we are uncertain about Kṛṣṇa of the Ṛg Vēda it is certain that the origin of the name is non-Āryan'.[129]

Different views have been expressed by various authors about Kṛṣṇa. They are of the opinion that 'Kṛṣṇa of Gita must be a different person from Kṛṣṇa of Mahābhārata. Kṛṣṇa of Mahābhāra doesn't seem to be the upholder of 'dharma'. The way in which Kṛṣṇa has killed Bhisma, Dhrōna, Karṇa and Dhriyodhana was unlawful'.[130]

Kṛṣṇa is described as a descendant of Vṛṣṇi family, a kṣatriya warrior, a pastoral hero, a leader of the Yādavās, a teacher of ethics, the author of Gita, and an enemy of Indra while he was living in Gokula and Vrindāvana. He is also portrayed as the son of Vāsudēva and Dēvaki who had assimilated various sectarian worships which

were prevalent during his period. S Radhakrishnan writes that 'kūṣṇa was incorporated with Vāsudēva and Viṣṇu of Vaiṣṇavism and thus was elevated to a strong position'.[131]

The Bālagōpāla worship is yet another important development in the history of Vaiṣṇavism. Historians point out that the worship of Krṣṇa-Govinda was practiced among the aborigines called Ābhiras of Malwa and Deccan. It is suggested by R.G. Bhandarkar that "Ābhiras might have migrated to the northern part of India at the later part of 2nd c. A.D. and in the earlier period of 3rd c. A.D. They might have brought with them the worship of 'boy-god', the story of the birth of this 'boy-god', the noble foster-father who was aware that the 'boy-god' was not his own son and stories connected with the murder of the innocent children. The last two aspects have correlation with Nanda, the foster-father of Krṣṇa and Kamsa who had murdered the small children. He further writes that 'they might have brought with them the name Christ.Their worship of the 'boy-god' might have been incorporated with Vāsudēva Krṣṇa. The Goanese and the Bengalis often pronounce the name Krṣṇa as 'Kristo' and 'Kusto' and so the Chirst of Ābhiras was recognized as the Sanskrit Krṣṇa:[132]

A.L. Bhasham also holds:

'The third aspect with which Krṣṇa was incorporated was the boy Krṣṇa. It is evidently clear that it was a later adaptation to the Krṣṇa cult. It could have been an adaptation of the stories brought by the Christian traders or Nestorians who came to the Western Coast of India in the medieval period. Some scholars may refute this point but it cannot be ignored as though it was not possible to happen'.[133]

The stories connected with the childhood and youthful days of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma which are found on the fragmentary relief of the second or third century A.D. in the collection of Mathura Museum (No. 1344) are considered to be the oldest.[134]

J.N. Banerjea further writes:

"Pl. XXVI. Fig. 1 illustrates a Deogarh relief in which Nanda and Yasoda, the adoptive cowherd parents of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, are standing side by side and caressing the infants in their rural surroundings; the cows in the background (not very clear in the reproduction) emphasise the pastoral character of the scene. The dress of the cowherd chief and his wife is to be noted; Yasoda wears a long skirt with a flowing veil covering her and sholders. The garment is characteristically foreign with a slight touch of late Gandhara element in it, and tradition records that these cowherds of Mathura and its environs belonged to Ābhira stock."[135]

Suffice is to infer that the worship of God in the form of a child had entered India from the alien soil which was later on incorporated with the Kṛṣṇa cult and thus Kṛṣṇa was deified as an avatar.

Varadaraja Ayyar affirms that 'there is no evidence to show that there are references about Kṛṣṇa's playful activities and he writes that Ramanuja and Madhva never accepted this'.[136] 'So is the case with Harivamsa also'.[137] Pattuppāṭṭu also do not mention about Kaṇṇan's lilas with the cowherd gilrs.[138]

The 'Rasa Lilas' of Gopi-Kṛṣṇa at Brindhavan tantamount to vulgarity and the amorous acts of Kṛṣṇa taking away the clothes of the cow-girls and Kṛṣṇa asking them to appear before him naked were given philosophic and allegorical explanations. Kṛṣṇa's

adulterous love with Radha is not an exception to this. In Bengal Vaiṣṇavism this had given rise to a new doctrine called 'Parakia'.

Asha Goswamy writes:

"The above would amply prove that the concept of the Hindus about the Avatār is symbolic and Krishna himself was just a human being and not the avatar of God, though of course the greatest among men."[139]

Asha Goswamy enumerates three stages in the development of Krṣṇnaism viz. '(1) incorporating Vāsudēva with Nārayaṇa (2) incorporating Vāsudēva-Krṣṇa, Balarāma, Samkarshaṇa, Pradhyumna and Anirudha as the emenated forms of Viṣṇu by devising a doctrine called Vyūha and (3) incorporating the worship of Bālagōpala with Krṣṇa'.[140]

King-worship and hero-worship had also contributed to the development of Vaiṣṇavism and Krṣṇaism. Tolkāppiyar in his aphorism text defines:

"Māyōn mēya manperuñ cirappin

Tāvā viḻuppukaḻp pūvai nilaiyum"[141]

'Pūvai nilai' gives room for the deification of a king. F. Hardy writes:

"The literary genre (denoted by the name of the flower) pūvai (= kāyāmpū) (consists in) the undecaying excellent praise of the great heroism of a king who is comparable (or compared?) to Māyōn.

In the later texts, the pūvai or kāyā flower is frequently compared to Krṣṇa's dark-blue complexion; thus the association of a King's heroism (via Māyōn) with this flower does not seem altogether arbitrary."[142]

In this line Nammālvār also mentions in his hymn as:

"Tiruvuṭai maṉṉaraik kāṇiṉ Tirumālaik Kaṇṭēṉē"[143]

The inclusion of Rama as an avatar of Viṣṇu was done in the same fashion as was done with Kūṣṇa. In ātikavi Vālmiki's Ramayana, Rama was an ordinary man, a high-souled hero but later on only he was deified as an incarnation. Kambar Christens his *magnum opus* as 'Ramāvatāra' (Kamba Rāmayaṇam).

It is evident that an avatar or incarnation is the descension of God in human form and not an ascension of man into God. The avatars depicted in the Indian epics, itikāsas etc. amply prove that they are only the ascension of human beings to the level of God. Vempeni writes:

"In the context of various grades of avatara existing in popular beliefs and in the context of the prevalent theories about Vyuhas, Vibhutis, amsavatars etc., it is quite tempting to say that every avatar is an ascent, utthanam."[144]

Radhakrishnan,S. defines: 'An avatar is a descent of God into man, and not an ascent of man into God'.[145]

The above facts convey that Kūṣṇaism cannot be considered to point to a pre-Christ period for the identification of Vāsudēva-Kūṣṇa with Gopāla-Kūṣṇa. According to F. Hardy the Southern Kūṣṇaism emerged by 6th c. A.D. He says:

"These many and separate analysis will ultimately suggest that popular segments of Tamil society had evolved a typically Southern Kṛṣṇaism by the sixth century or so, with peculiar myths and religious attitudes, and that this form of Kṛṣṇaism stood in contrast not only to the

spirit of the Tirumāl hymns in the Paripāṭal, but also to the treatment of Māyōn in the formulated akattiṇai conventions (and projected on folk Kṛṣṇaism by the rennaissance literati)".[146]

R.G. Bandarkar states that 'the cult of Rama must have come into existence about the eleventh century.'[147] The sectarian cults, minor gods, hero-worship, king-workship etc. were amalgamated into Vaiṣṇavism and the doctrine of incarnation which was introduced to India after the 1st century A.D. had given rise to the present religion of Vaiṣṇavism.

Conclusion

As was pointed out Vaiṣṇavism is a product of Tamil land, and integral religion of the Dravidians, which is very much the outcome of the Tamil Bhakti Movement. The land of the Dravidians is the birth place of Bhakti Movement.

<div align="center">"Utpannā drāvida bhakti"[148]</div>

Vedicism is not the source of Hindu religion and the various aspects of Vedas that are made available to us are based on sacrificial worship of the minor gods, the benevolent forces and other objects of creations personified as gods and these are worships associated with animism, henotheism, spiritism etc. Temple-worship, avatar doctrine etc. were unknown to the four Vedas of the Āryans. The pragmatic evidences are to be gleened out from the four Vedas regarding the development of Vaiṣṇavism would be, thus, a futile attempt to proceed with.

Yamuna was the first exponent of Visiṣṭādvaita and he was the grandson of Nāthamuni. Yāmuna's disciples were the teachers of Ramanuja. 'Nāthamuni received from Nammāḻvār, the Tiruvoimoḻl,

which according to Madhurakavi is the Tamil Veda, Viṣṇu's revelation in Tamil of Himself – so the sampradāya had its legitimate origin in Viṣṇu the parabrahman'.[149]

The contributory factors of the Old Testament background of God's visionary guidance in the form of 'cloud' to the Israelites may not be of less importance.

The hymns dedicated to Tirumāl in Paripātal constitute a veritable storehouse of information about Vaiṣṇavism in the south. The scholars assign 5th or 6th c. A.D. as the most probable date for Paripāṭal.

Māyōn is considered as the ancient pre-Aryan Tamil deity and he was identified with Krṣṇa according to Zvelebil and others. According to Thani Nayagam, Māyōn is nothing but the adaptation of the Tamil Murukan to a pastoral environment and form of life. But F. Hardy holds that 'there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that Māyōn is anything but Krṣṇa Viṣṇu'.[150] The Cankam corpus is secular and in the initial period the Ālvars sing in praise of Siva and Viṣṇu as unified God with two forms.

The various names of Gods of the sixfold religion, viz. Siva, Sakti, Viṣṇu, Pillaiyār, Murukan, Braman and Ayyappan constitute the members of Siva family, and subsequently they were developed into six different religions/denominations.

The early avatārs of Viṣṇu were therimorphous and later, anthromorphous. The lists of avatar invariably differ from one source to another. The stories of different avatārs amplify one important aspect of the ascendancy of Viṣṇu as a Supreme Lord. The essence of Vaiṣṇava philosophy evolved later is based on the avatār doctrine.

The doctrine of avatār, as evidenced by our study, was developed in the Indian religions only in the Christ era. It is a historical

fact that Christianity had contributed to the avatār doctrine. The Bhāgavata cult adopted the Vrṇi heroes (the non-Aryan tribe to which Vasudeva-Krṣṇa belonged) as their divinites as an outcome of deification. A separate concept of 'Vyūha' was developed and with which the family members of Yadu or Vṛṣni were pronounced as avatārs of Viṣṇu.

The fundamental aspects of Sri Vaiṣṇavism (Visiṣṭādvaita) formulated by Ramanuja show that Vaiṣṇavism is basically founded on the Trinitarian dogmatics which are again the basics of Christianity. The 'five modes' or Mūrti Bhēdas are nothing but the expressions of 'Para' (God the Father) 'Apara' (God the son) and 'Para para' (Holy Spirit) or Antaryāmitva which is a state in which He dewells in the heart of all embodied human beings. This doctrine is a New Testament doctrine (1 Cor. 3:16, 17;6:19, 2 Cor. 6:16). The virgin birth of Jesus gets reflected in Vaiṣṇavism as 'divyam janma'[151] (holy birth) as evidenced in the Gita.

The animal sacrifice which played a predominant role in the Vedic worship was discontinued in the Indian religions and in these religions the rituals were performed with flowers, fruits etc. The palipiṭam (sacrificial altar) near the entrance of the Hindu temples are no more adorned with animal blood. This stands as an evidence that the Hindu religion, whether Saivism or Vaiṣṇavism, is a religion of the fulfillment of sacrifice. The Old Testament sacrificing of animals are no more practiced in the New Testament doctrines because Jesus had offered himself as the 'Supreme Sacrifice' for the remission of the sins of the mankind and thus the whole humanity was redeemed. This being the reason, Vaiṣṇavism also falls in line with the religions of the fulfillment of sacrifice.

The constitutional bondage of man is yet another basic tenet of Vaiṣṇavism. Man is born in bondage (janmabhandam-Gita) and

Vaiṣṇavism doesn't elaborate how and when this bondage occurred. This is evidenced only in the Bible as a dogma. Scholars have brought out the identical tenets of salvation according to Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity.

The Christian salvation by faith is documented as 'saraṇāgati' in Vaiṣṇavism. Saraṇāgati is the *summum bonum* of Christianity and Vaiṣṇavism. By affirming faith in Him the deeds also are sanctified because by submission of oneself unto God the whole sensory organs are tamed towards perfection, holiness. This finally will lead him to 'Mōksha', a place of eschatological in nature, attaining 'ācāryaṉ tiruvaṭI'-the feet of the Lord so as to live in eternal bliss with Him.

Pāncarātra and Bhāgavata religions professed human equality and humane love. The evil of corruption and distortions had gained their venomous entry into Vaiṣṇavism and gradually this universal religion of love was captured by the brāhmanical forces and Vaiṣṇavism was subjucated. Caste discrimination has been condemned by āḻvārs. Toṇṭaraṭipoṭiāḻvār says:

"Paḻutilā voḻuka laṟṟup
Palacatup pētimārkaḷ

Iḻikulat tavarka lēlum
Emmati yārka ḷākil
Toḻuminir koṭumiṉ koḷmiṉ"[152]

The revolutionary acts of Rāmānuja, what he did for the outcastes-'Tirukkulattār'-may be quoted here as the Vaiṣṇavite proclamation of universal humane love. Christ's teaching of 'love thy neighbour as thyself'[153] is the fore-most philosophy of humane love.

A careful scrutiny of Vaiṣṇavism in the background of historical perspective clearly reveals that the cults prevalent among the people were amalgamated with Vaiṣṇavism at different stages identifying Vāsudēva with Viṣṇu, identifying Nārāyaṇa with Vasudeva, identifying Krṣṇa with Vāsudeva and incorporating the boy-god Bālagōpala with the above streams projected as a monotheistic religion.

R.G. Bandarkar also observes:

"The Hindu habit of thought of identifying one god with others by regarding the latter either as forms or incarnations of the former, and thus evolving monotheism out of polytheism, led to the identification of this Vāsudeva with other gods and with the boy Krṣṇa of Gokula".[154]

The transmigration of ideologies along with Indian foreign trade was not an unreality. Apostle Thomas' mission in North India (Taxila), Malabar coast and Mylapore and his martyrdom at St. Thomas Mount are historically supported by very many evidences and the influence of his ministry might have brought about a sea change in the religious history of India.

The significance of Sanskrit has to be taken into account for our study. The earliest epigraphic evidence on languages employed in India comes from the inscriptions of Ashoka inscribed in 3rd c. B.C. Ashoka took care that his missages were intelligible to all and he used a particular kind of Prakrit. He even translated his messages to Greek, Aramaic, Pali, Dravidi (Tamil) and Arthamagati but there are no inscriptions in Sanskrit. The first evidence of Sanskrit is seen around 150 A.D. and only from 5th c. A.D. Classical Sanskrit is seen to be the dominant language in the inscriptions.

The first Sanskrit inscription mentioned above records the repair of a dam originally built by Chandra Gupta Maurya.[155] Therefore the Sanskrit works cannot be dated before 2nd c. A.D.

In this background of evaluation, if the alleged process of interpolations, mutilations, corruptions and misinterpretations done to the original works of Vaiṣṇavism are carefully analysed, then the analysis leads to the conclusion that Vaiṣṇavism owes its origin to Christianity.

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68. Genesis, 3:15.

69. John, 4:42, John 4:14.

70. Titus, 3, 2:10; 3:4; 1:4; 2:13, 3:6.

71. பொய்ந்நின்ற ஞானமும் பொல்லா ஒழுக்கும் அழுக்குடம்பும்
    இந்நின்ற நீர்மை இனியாம் உறாமை உயிரளிப்பான்
    எந்நின்ற யோனியு மாய்ப்பிறந் தாய் இமை யோர்தலைவா
    மெய்ந்நின்று கேட்டரு ளாய்அடி யேன்செய்யும் விண்ணப்பமே.
    (நம்மாழ்வார், திருவிருத்தம், 1).
    Nammāḷvār, Tiruviruttam, 1.

72. Revelation, 19:11.

73. Revelation, 19:14-15.

74. Radhakrishnan, S., Indian Philosophy Vol. I, Blackie & Son Pub. Pvt. Ltd., Madras, 1977, p. 607.

75. Genesis, 1:27.

76. "பாரமாய பழவினை பற்றறுத்து என்னைத்தன்
    வாரமாக்கி வைத்தான் வைத்தன்றி என்னுள் புகுந்தான்
    கோர மாதவம் செய்தனன்கொ லறியேன்
                        அரங்கத்தம்மான்திரு
    ஆர மார்வது அன்றோ அடியேனை ஆட்கொண்டதே."
    Nāvāviram 931

77. "பிறவித் துயரற ஞானத்துள் நின்று"
    Nāyāyiram, 2148.

78. "சார்ந்த இருவல் வினைகளும்
    சரித்து மாயப் பற்றறுத்து"
    Nāyāyiram, 2135.

79. "தொல்வினை தீரலாரும்"
    Nāyāyiram, 2457.

80. "பெருமையுடைய பிரானார்-இருமை வினை கடிவரே"
    Nāyāyiram, 2145.

81. "இருள்சேர் இருவினையும் சேரா இறைவன்
    பொருள்சேர் புகழ்புரிந்தார் மாட்டு"
    Tirukkuṛal, 7.

82. Bhagavad Gita, XV:5.

83. Ibid., II. 51.

84. Ibid., II. 39.

85. Ibid., III. 9.

86. Vempeny, Ishanand, Op. cit., p. 157.

87. Bhagavad Gita, II.62-63.

88. "tpidNad; tpidjPh; kUe;jhdha;"
    Nāyāyiram, 2131.

89. Tirukkuṛal, 268.

90. Sivajñāna Bhōtam, 8.

91. Nāyāyiram, 931.

92. Friedhelm Hardy, Viraha-Bhakti, Oxford University Press, Oxford
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93. John, 3:16.

94. Matthew, 22:37-39.

95. Vempeny, Ishanand, Op. cit., p. 217.

96. Indira Parthasarathy, Op. cit., p. 81.

97. Friedhelm Hardy, Op. cit., p. 37.

98. Hemchandra Raychandhuri, Op. cit., p. 10.

99. Bhagavad Gita, XVIII:66.

100. Nāyāyiram, 843.

101. Friedhelm Hardy, Op. cit., p. 441.

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103. Romans, 6:13.
104. Galatians, 2:20.
105. Jitendra Nath Banerjea, Op. cit., p. 48.
106. Ibid.
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109. Bhagavad Gita, VIII. 4.
110. Ibid., IX.16.
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137. Ibid.

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139. Asha Goswamy, Krishna Katha and Allied Matters, Y.R. Pub., Delhi, 1984, p. 186.

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141. மாயோன் மேய மன்பெருஞ் சிறப்பின்
    தாவா விழுப்புகழ்ப் பூவை நிலையும
    Tolkāppiyam, Puram, 60.

142. Friedhelm Hardy, Op. cit., p. 155.

143. Nālāyiram, 2454.

144. Vempeny, Ishanand, Op. cit., pp. 265-66.

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146. Friedhelm Hardy, Op. cit., pp. 169-70.

147. Bhandarkar, R.G., Op. cit., p. 66.

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151. Bhagavad Gita, IV:9.

152. "பழுதிலா ஒழுகா லாற்றுப் பலசதுப் பேதி மார்கள்
    இழிகுலத் தவர்க ேளனும் எம்மடி யார்க ளாகில்
    தொழுமின்நீர் கொடுமின் கொண்மின்"
    Nālāyiram, 913.

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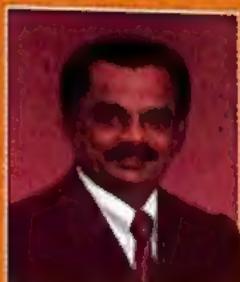
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